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ABSTRACT

A study examining portfolio practice in selected elementary programs throughout the United States is reported in this paper. The survey covered 150 "nominated" contacts, including states, districts, schools, school teams, and individual teachers. Respondents worked from a largely blank sheet of paper, which they used to "brainstorm" and "cluster" their ideas about student portfolios. A group of two dozen respondents participated in a 2-day working conference where they documented and analyzed their collective experience with the portfolio concept. Group sessions were videotaped and analyzed. Results found three themes that appeared to capture the essence of contemporary practice: (1) teachers in the portfolio movement convey an intense commitment and personal renewal; (2) the technical foundations for portfolio assessment appear infirm and inconsistent at all levels; and (3) portfolio practice at the school and teacher level shies away from standards and grades, toward narrative and descriptive reporting. Based on these preliminary findings, a "Teacher Logbook" was designed to support and effectuate the portfolio approach, and to connect portfolios to other facets of teacher professionalization. The Teacher Logbook accomplishes several interrelated tasks: journal documentation by the teacher of evidence bearing on student performances; summary judgments of student achievement; and a complementary record of curriculum events supporting student learning. For the portfolio movement to succeed it must be connected to the other supporting components in a manner that continues to meet internal classroom needs while satisfying external policy demands. (A figure illustrating the Teacher Logbook is included. Contains 19 references.) (RS)

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Student Portfolios and Teacher Logs: Blueprint for a Revolution in Assessment

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Alternative assessment of student achievement has arrived on the scene during the past decade as a paradigm shift, a fundamental change from earlier reliance on standardized testing techniques (Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991). Several features distinguish the new alternatives (Calfee, 1992):

- *Production* rather than *recognition*; students must demonstrate competence rather than selecting an answer.
- *Projects* rather than *items*, a choice of depth over breadth; validity supersedes reliability as conventionally defined.
- *Informed judgment* rather than *mechanical scoring*; the teacher replaces the Scantron in the assessment process.

Theory seems far in advance of practice. Teachers are reportedly "doing portfolios," reviewing student projects, encouraging exhibitions (Harp, 1991; Murphy & Smith, 1991; Smith, 1991; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Psychometricians seem uneasy about these developments, uncertain about how to standardize performance, concerned about reliability and validity (e.g., Hambleton & Murphy, in press).

This article reviews the concept of alternative assessment in a specific situation: *teacher assessment of student achievement in the literate use of language in the elementary grades*. This domain is interesting as a test case. On the one hand, elementary reading achievement is a centerpiece of the psychometric enterprise; standardized tests are more common in elementary reading and language than any other area of school achievement. Writing achievement in the elementary grades has been less consequential; standardized writing tests typically appear around eighth grade. On the other hand, portfolios and writing journals have found a welcome reception in the elementary grades, building on the tradition of informal assessment (Pikulski & Shanahan, 1982).

As a practical enterprise, the literacy portfolio comprises a folder containing "situated" samples of student reading and writing performance (Calfee & Hiebert, 1991; Valencia & Calfee, 1991). The student assembles a

collection of materials during the school year: lists of books "read," reading notes, rough drafts, "conferencing" memos, final drafts and published versions. Some tasks are assigned, others are free-form. Some are substantial projects, others a page or less. Each individual assembles his or her own folder, but the contents may include collaborative projects.

The idea behind this activity is that portfolios provide an opportunity for "richer," more authentic (i.e., more valid) assessment of student achievement; educators will learn what students can do when they have adequate time and resources. While the concept has immediate appeal, questions arise equally quickly, for both researcher and practitioner: What should be included in the folder? What process should be used to evaluate the student's work? What standards should be used to decide on the adequacy of student work? What can the assessments be used for? Some educators have proposed that portfolios replace standardized tests altogether, but what if every teacher approaches the task with different processes and standards?

In this article, we first present preliminary findings from a survey of portfolio practice in selected elementary programs throughout the United States.[1] The survey, designed to inform the preceding questions, suggests that the portfolio movement is broad but thin at the level of teacher practice (the survey did *not* cover performance-based assessment practices in large-scale testing programs). The second part of the paper presents a new concept, the *Teacher Logbook*, designed to support and effectuate the portfolio approach, and to connect portfolios to other facets of teacher professionalization.

THE STUDENT PORTFOLIO: PRESENT PRACTICE

According to articles in outlets like *Education Week* and *Educational Leadership*, "regular" classroom teachers are taking leadership in this movement. To be sure, a few states (e.g., Vermont) and a more substantial number of districts have discussed replacing test programs (in part or whole) with portfolios (e.g., Pelavin, 1991). But the movement appears to have the flavor of a revolution: teachers regaining control of assessment policy, tasks that require students to demonstrate what they have learned, "bottom up" rather than "top down" decisions. Under auspices of the National Center for the Study of Writing (CSW), we conducted a nation-wide survey of portfolio practice. The goal of the CSW survey was to move beyond headlines (and newsletter reports) to determine what educators mean when they say that they are "doing portfolios." The survey focused on *writing* assessment, but "products" were often in response to reading assignments.

What we found

The survey covered 150 "nominated" contacts, including states, districts, schools, school teams, and individual teachers. The survey was not random,

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[1]The survey was conducted under auspices of the National Center for the Study of Writing, University of California at Berkeley. Further details on the sample, methods, and findings are available in Calfee & Perfumo, 1992.

but can be viewed as an effort to assess best practice. The survey employed a qualitative method, "webbing," familiar to many elementary and middle-grade teachers. Respondents were instructed to work from a largely blank sheet of paper, which they used to "brainstorm" and "cluster" their ideas about student portfolios. To help the respondents (and to provide some degree of structure to the responses), we divided the survey into distinctive "chunks": *Background and history* (how did you get into portfolios?); *Portfolios in the classroom* (what does the concept mean in practice?); *Portfolio Process* (how do you do it?); *Portfolio Impact* (what do you see as the effect of portfolios for your students and for you?). A separate response sheet was provided for each category, along with several starter questions. This methodology proved quite successful, from our perspective. Respondents provided exceptionally rich and informative data, filling several pages with notes and reflections.

We employed a complementary strategy for obtaining in-depth information from a selected group of two dozen respondents. We convened a two-day working conference, where working groups of participants documented and analyzed their collective experience with the portfolio concept, including their own situations but also reports from other projects about which they were knowledgeable. The group sessions were videotaped, and we analyzed the content of these sessions as well as graphic reports prepared by each group. In addition, each individual prepared a post-conference "reflective essay," the final entry in the "portfolio" that each individual completed before, during, and after the conference.

The data set from this survey comprises 70 "packets" of information. Two state-level projects are represented, along with several districts (about ten percent of the sample) and a substantial number of total-school efforts (about thirty percent). The remainder are singletons, individual teachers who adopted the portfolio process on their own initiative with little support, often developing procedures from scratch. Packets from states and districts were generally quite polished; responses from schools and individuals were more homespun, but struck us as more authentic.

The analysis of this complex array of information turned up three themes that appear to us to capture the essence of this admittedly non-random sample of contemporary practice (see Calfee & Perfumo, 1992, for details). Briefly, (a) teachers who have enlisted in the portfolio movement convey an intense commitment and personal renewal; (b) the technical foundations for portfolio assessment appear infirm and inconsistent at all levels; and (c) portfolio practice at the school and teacher level shies away from standards and grades, toward narrative and descriptive reporting.

First, the matter of commitment and renewal. Across wide variations in approaches and definition, the portfolio approach has energized the professional status and development of educators, especially classroom teachers. This response is partly affective; people who have felt themselves a subclass report spending enormous amounts of time and energy rethinking the meaning of their work, and they feel good about this renewed

commitment. A common theme is "ownership." Teachers talk about "being in charge" of their instructional programs. They describe the benefit to students of taking responsibility to select and critique their writing.

Here are selected excerpts reflecting this theme:

- By allowing—no, requiring!—teachers to develop their own systems, teachers gained a renewed belief in students and in themselves. Our teachers will fight to keep portfolios in their classrooms.
- Teachers began to "toy" with portfolios. We wanted a richer portrait of children's overall growth during the school year. Our district used pre-post tests. We found this was not enough information nor the *right* kind of information. Our own teachers have served as mentors to each other as some people are farther along in understanding portfolios.
- I am certain that the power of portfolios lies in helping teachers and students focus on the teaching/learning process.
- Students have begun to claim "ownership" of portfolios and strive to "perform" and do their best.... [The process] fosters positive feelings. Everything doesn't have to be perfect the first time. Ideas come first.
- In 19XX the money dried up and the project directors left.... As a strong proponent, I decided to take over without monetary compensation.

Second, the surveys, interviews, and associated documents all disclose a lack of analytic and technical substance. For instance, respondents claim that an important purpose of portfolios is valid assessment of student progress and growth, yet nowhere in the packets can we find a clear account of how achievement is to be measured. District and state activities generally attempt to incorporate judgments and standards, usually through holistic ratings by external groups; school and classroom projects seldom describe how to convert a folder of work into a gauge of achievement. Also missing is discussion of conventional (or unconventional) approaches for establishing validity and reliability. Validity is assumed to inhere in the authenticity of the portfolio process; reliability is simply not discussed. (One state-level project employs panel correlation for reliability; each portfolio is scored by a panel of two or more teacher-judges to establish consistency. This practice is rare in the districts in our sample, and was not mentioned by any school or teacher respondents.)

The most immediate technical concern of most participants is staff development. The emphasis is on learning about portfolio concepts and techniques, and in establishing and refining a workable model for local implementation. Beyond the pragmatics of implementation, the next concern is how to support students in completing portfolios.

The following excerpts demonstrate the intense concern with getting underway:

- We embarked on a year-long research project involving all K-6 teachers [with a consultant].... Involving students in selection of portfolio pieces and their own assessment is the heart of our process. [The portfolios] represent student work over time and are interdisciplinary. We have all levels—working files, teacher portfolios, showcases, cumulative records, and competency portfolios. They show the growth of

the student, and demonstrate what the student really can do, does, and knows. Students assess their own growth. Standards are developed within each classroom.... Teachers at each grade level work together to score competencies.

- Last year we went to training sessions and struggled over purposes. By the end of the year, five teachers really "tried to do something" with portfolios.... We are learners, explorers, teachers!
- The Literacy Portfolio has three components. The Core kept by all District elementary teachers includes Reading Development Checklist, writing samples, and list of books read. The Core follows each child throughout the elementary grades. The Optional Component varies according to the teacher; I like first drafts, audio tapes of story readings, [etc.]. This portion is used to confer with parents, to direct instruction, and for report cards. The Personal Folder, used by teachers for parent communication, includes attitude surveys, work samples (and comments), goals for the next term, [etc.]. These go home with report cards.
- Students receive critiques formally and informally at all stages of work. They conference with teachers and peers, and share work with the whole class, with the expectation that every child will eventually produce her best quality work. All final drafts are celebrated and displayed for the school or community. They are not graded; they should all be "A" quality work for that child.
- While the portfolio model yielded exciting results, over time it did not transfer as well as I had hoped. The records seemed mechanical and routinized. I think this was largely due to the selection criteria into which students had no input. Now I negotiate with students for the portfolio, for time management as well as of obtaining passing grade.

Third, as foreshadowed in the preceding section, respondents exhibit a definite distaste for evaluation. They did not want to set standards or assign grades for students or programs. This reaction is captured by the remark, "I wish grades would just go away!" Teachers were willing to judge individual compositions and other student work samples, but were uncomfortable about assessing an entire portfolio. The Evaluation section of the surveys received the fewest and briefest entries, but the substance is captured by these excerpts:

- Many teachers use criteria written on the report card for giving grades. Others felt grades influenced choices and so did not grade the papers, but noted students' strengths and weaknesses and set appropriate goals.
- Each student sets goals for self at the beginning, which they review and explain to me. Students decide, based on their projects and goals, what grade they should receive. If I had my say, we'd go through the same process but there'd be no grade. A grade is something the school insists on.

What the findings mean

Our survey suggests that complex reactions are materializing in response to the portfolio concept. To be sure, these findings hold for selected situations brought to our attention because of their reputation for "being unique." We have conducted several informal site visits, and are impressed by the range of implementations, from intensive commitments where portfolios are a dominant feature of the instructional day, to situations where portfolios are no more than manila folders holding assorted papers.

Complementing the three themes from the findings, we venture three interpretive comments about the portfolio movement. First, the popularity of

the portfolio concept often appears as a local reaction to external control. While most elementary and middle school teachers accept standardized tests as the "standard," the rebels who "do portfolios" discover in this concept a way to express their professionalism. It is unfortunate that the movement finds so little undergirding technological support. Teachers cannot call upon "Cronbach alphas" or "latent trait theory" when asked to reassure policy makers that they know what they are doing.

Which leads to the second theme. The portfolio concept amounts to virtual anarchy in many quarters. Most practical articles and newsletters, as well as popular books on alternative and authentic assessment, encourage an "anything goes" approach. Education is subject to pendulum swings, and portfolios may fall into this category. To be sure, the times call for substantial changes in educational practice and policy, but absent a technological foundation the portfolio movement is in peril.

Finally, what are the prospects that the portfolio movement will sustain its present fervor? Three possibilities come to mind. (a) It will disappear for lack of an audience. Portfolio assessment, if taken seriously, entails an enormous amount of work for teachers (and students). "Who's interested?" will eventually become a compelling consideration. (b) It will become standardized. We have seen examples in our survey artifacts: preprinted folders with sections for (often mundane) entries. (c) It will become a genuine revolution. We consider this outcome likely only if accompanied by other systemic changes in the educational process. The third prospect is compelling, but it remains to be seen whether changes in assessment will become a policy lever for school reform (Newmann, 1991). We think that such leverage is likely to require a more systematic role for student portfolios in the teacher's daily life, and toward this end we explore in the next section a concept that complements the student portfolio.

THE TEACHER'S LOGBOOK: FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

In the survey responses, classroom portfolios typically rely on the teacher for design and interpretation. The assumption is that collections of student work will automatically assist the teacher in instructional decision-making and local feedback. Evaluation by the classroom teacher (accompanied in some instances by student or peer judgment) is the primary technique for converting the collection of artifacts into an explicit judgment.

These conditions leave unanswered several questions about purpose, audience, and procedure in the systematic use of portfolios for assessing student achievement. How to deal with issues of reliability and trustworthiness? How to connect with other assessment methods and outcomes (e.g., grades, parent conferences, standardized tests)? How to manage consistency for students during their years of schooling within and between grades and schools? To be sure, one simple answer to these and related questions is to mandate standardized portfolios as an alternative or complement to existing standardized tests. This possibility merits comment, but we will not address the issue here.

The most serious hurdle in the way of implementing the preceding concepts, for purposes both of research and practice, is the difficulty of sustaining systematic teacher assessment. On the surface, the collecting of student work seems simple enough; difficulties arise in deciding how to select work samples and how to assess these samples in an informative and consistent manner. The *Teacher Logbook* is designed to address these issues. Figure 1 displays the organization of a Logbook designed to accomplish several interrelated tasks: journal documentation by the teacher of evidence bearing on student performances; summary judgments of student achievement; and a complementary record of curriculum events supporting student learning.

As laid out in the figure, student summaries are placed at the beginning of the Logbook, because these play the most critical role in reporting student achievement. The journal notes provide space for the teacher to record ongoing information relevant to student performance; these pages, located in the middle of the Logbook, serve as a working space for the teacher to document observations, informal assessments of student activities and projects, and questions requiring further thought and action (Richert, 1991). The notes are a natural place for comments about student portfolio entries, along with more formal assessments. Curriculum planning is at the end of the Logbook. These entries are quite different from the routinized "lesson plans" typically completed by teachers to meet bureaucratic mandates. They are long-term working plans organized by curriculum goals, with room for commentary and revision.

Critical to the Logbook technique is the concept of a developmental curriculum, a small set of critical domains with mileposts that serve as targets for the school. For instance, in the literacy curriculum, comprehension and composition in the narrative genre is an important outcome for the elementary grades. Within the narrative form, four outcomes are generally recognized as critical for competence in handling literature: character, plot, setting, and theme. For kindergartners, appreciating the moral of simple fables might be a reasonable goal. By second grade, students may be expected to identify thematic issues implicit in a work such as *Charlotte's Web*, and to express the meaning of the work in personal terms. Sixth graders should be fully capable of employing thematic elements in their own compositions, and to identify multiple themes in collections of related texts.

The Logbook concept builds on the notion that the teacher, with a developmental curriculum in mind, regularly records brief notes about individual students in the "profile" section. The comments provide a concrete record for reflection and action. An empty profile sheet is a reminder that the student has slipped from sight. A sheet showing a long list of "books read" but no evidence of written work is a prod to encourage the student to put his or her thoughts on paper. Teachers keep mental records of this sort; the Logbook is designed as a "memory jogger," and a source of information for reflection and assessment.

THE TEACHER LOGBOOK

Section I: Student Summary

Fall Entry Level

Student	Reading/Writing/Language			Math	...
	Vocab	Narrative	Expos Skills		
Able, J.					
.....					
Zeno, K.					

Section II: Journal Notes

Week of _____

Section III: Curriculum Plan/Record

Plans for Fall Qtr

Sep:	Activities	Vocab	Narr	Expos Skills
	UpDate			
Dec:	Activities	Vocab	Narr	Expos Skills
	UpDate			

Figure 1. The teacher logbook.

The Profile notes are the basis for summary assessments. We imagine a procedure in which, on a regular basis, perhaps once a quarter, the teacher conducts a formal rating of each student's achievement level in the Summary section of the Logbook. The entries reflect the teacher's judgment about each student's location on the developmental curriculum scale, based on analysis of the profile notes, which provide the link to the student portfolios. For instance, a teacher might judge a third grade student as handling a theme at a level appropriate to first-grade expectations; the student is still at the level of mundane morals.

The Profile-Summary combination is designed to address the technical problems that appear in our survey, and that have been raised by psychometrists as concerns about the portfolio approach, without compromising the advantages inherent in the engagement of the teacher in the assessment process as a professional decision-maker. First, Profile documentation provides a concrete record to serve as a flexible basis for linking evidence to judgment. The journal format fits the realities of the teacher's daily life; standardized approaches to documentation will certainly fail because of the intolerable time pressures endemic to the teaching profession. If a school staff shares a common technical language for curriculum and instruction, then abbreviated notes serve the teacher's individual purposes, but also communicate significant meaning to colleagues.

This linkage is an important consideration in addressing issues of validity and reliability. By what means can the teacher's summary judgments about students be gauged for consistency and trustworthiness. Our answer to this question relies on the concept of *panel judgments;* much like an Olympic panel, classroom teachers can validate their evaluations through cross-checks (the British refer to this process as the "moderation" task). The workability of this approach relies on the emergence of the teacher as a practical researcher (Calfee & Hiebert, 1988), with the school taking shape as a context for assessment. Several examples can be found to support the practicality of this proposal. In California, for example, panels are incorporated in the Self-Study and PQR (Program Quality Review) process conducted by every school in the state once every three years. The idea is also reflected in the frameworks produced by professional organizations (e.g., NCTE and IRA), in the work of grade level teams in many elementary schools, in the maintenance of department standards in secondary schools, and in the shared leadership typical of school restructuring.

Conceptually, the panel judgment process can call upon established methods of generalizability theory as a foundation. To be sure, application of the theory to panel judgments requires the construction of designs that identify significant factors likely to influence the judgment process. As a first cut, we suggest as critical factors the *curriculum domain* (holistic assessment of an entire portfolio is likely to fall prey to the same variability as for writing samples; we think that the teachers in our survey were wise when they resisted holistic judgments), *task conditions* (e.g., standardized vs. open-ended, constrained vs. project-based), *contextual factors* (e.g., individual vs. group, with or without instructional support and resources), and *characteristics of the judges* (e.g., colleagues, administrators, external "experts").

The conceptual task of designing and validating the Logbook concept strikes us as no less demanding than the practical issues of implementation. We find in the survey responses little evidence of systematic documentation by teachers, unless this action was externally mandated. Most research on this issue is lacking in authentic purpose and genuine audience; the purposes are

primarily for research, and the audience is the researcher. Kenneth Wolf's (1992) dissertation on classroom portfolios (similar to the Logbook) is rich in its accounts of student work samples, but thin on teacher records. Teachers agreed to document the performance of two target students, but ran out steam midway through the school year. In Shulman's (1990) Teacher Assessment Project, teacher logs were an important component in the design of the Literacy component. Beginning teachers compiled professional portfolios during the school year for display during a performance demonstration before an expert panel comprising peers and academics. Collegial meetings during the year provided direction and support. The candidates, third grade teachers, included in their professional portfolio a progress record for four target students within their classroom, a record parallel to the Logbook concept. While the final report of this Project is still in progress, preliminary findings suggest that with adequate support and purpose, teachers found the documentation task both feasible and informative.

Alternative assessment and student portfolios tend to appear in combination with other elements: whole language rather than basal readers, cooperative instruction rather than didactic teacher-talk, school-based decision-making rather than top-down direction, the teacher as professional rather than as civil servant. Many of the survey responses described how externally-initiated projects *not* related to portfolios evolved into alternative assessment.

Our sense is that this "package" offers the opportunity for fundamental reform in U. S. schooling. The various components are seldom connected in a coherent manner, and so teachers are easily overwhelmed by the multiplicity of demands. The enthusiasm and commitment of portfolio teachers is impressive, but the costs and benefits are disquieting. The portfolio movement seems likely to falter and fail unless it is connected to the other supporting components in a manner that continues to meet internal classroom needs (valid data for instructional decisions) while satisfying external policy demands (reliable information for accountability purposes; Fullan, 1991). We have proposed the Teacher's Logbook as a bridge capable of spanning this chasm. For the Logbook to become a reality will require (a) establishment of a serious "audience" for this activity, and (b) provision of adequate professional development.

Absent such support, our guess is that the portfolio movement will eventually fall of its own weight. Selected teachers will rely on their professional judgment for deciding what to teach and how to teach it, and for rendering assessments to interested audiences. External authorities may entertain the idea of portfolios, performances, and exhibitions, but cost-effectiveness will eventually carry the day (this shift has happened in the past; witness the early years of NAEP, Tyler, 1969). And another chance to improve the quality of schooling in the United States will have slipped through our fingers.

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING
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The National Center for the Study of Writing, one of the national educational research centers sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, is located at the Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley, with a site at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Center provides leadership to elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities as they work to improve the teaching and learning of writing. The Center supports an extensive program of educational research and development in which some of the country's top language and literacy experts work to discover how the teaching and learning of writing can be improved, from the early years of schooling through adulthood. The Center's four major objectives are: (1) to create useful theories for the teaching and learning of writing; (2) to understand more fully the connections between writing and learning; (3) to provide a national focal point for writing research; and (4) to disseminate its results to American educators, policy-makers, and the public. Through its ongoing relationship with the National Writing Project, a network of expert teachers coordinated through Berkeley's Graduate School of Education, the Center involves classroom teachers in helping to shape the Center's research agenda and in making use of findings from the research. Underlying the Center's research effort is the belief that research both must move into the classroom and come from it; thus, the Center supports "practice-sensitive research" for "research-sensitive practice."

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